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Grammar of Paradise // Grammar of Traps // Grammar of Stasis

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The Grammar of Paradise

In Tortola, when you go, they bury you
under a white concrete slab which,
for good measure, they top off with
two or three more slabs,
smaller but equally white:

an oblong ziggurat, topped
with a cross. Your visitors can sit
on you or one of your neighbors
and lunch on a roti or sandwich as they
remember and discuss you
and then move on to other topics,

looking across to low houses
and shops, their doors, roofs,
and window shutters in
gleeful toybox colors and
overhead, coconut palms and
the magenta blooms of bougainvillea.

The sun smiles down, as it does
most of the time. The sea surrounds
and laps at the rocks like a lover
at your feet. Slowly the sun shifts.

Slowly the sidereal nighttime sky rolls around,
the moon, planets, constellations.

Boats sway on their moorings.
Americans dream in their moving berths.
Back home, for weeks in the future, they will rock
in their timeless dreams, their beds afloat
on lapis and turquoise inside
their quiet-colored northern houses.

But if, as I say, you have come to rest
in the glowing blue and green of the islands,
your swaying and rocking time is over.
And it seems nobody has anything but time here
where, all day, roosters step down the road
and crow in the knowledge of announcing God.

The Grammar of Traps

Starfish sees the trap of fractals, the decorator's rule of five, Japanese flower arrangements, the pruned branches of privet, yes, and tributaries back in their banks.

Memory sees the trap of logical, longitudinal, linear progression.

Trash can sees the trap of closure.

Ring sees the trap of whose diamond is biggest. And, infinity. Again.

Grid sees the trap of city, cemetery, supermarket aisle, cropland, parade.

Artist sees the trap of disorder, the entropy of life, the spinning-out into shambles of her process, the partly-filled notebooks, paper clips corralling scraps of extra lines, erasures and elisions between.

The Grammar of Stasis

So, self-portrait as a windmill.
Sing, one-pointed desire, Dona Quixote repeating
I want to do right but not right now.

Stand, the stiffness of my dress,
all cedar shingles ruffled in East End gales.
Stir, the groaning arms that lift to greet
such intimacies. Yes, wind came to me
and I welcomed its handling, was built for it.
Straining, spinning, I only knew
one dance. Oh, sigh all around me,
why was I made to wait?

Stuck, I fought against
the salty air, looking out,
never up. Stay,
Mrs. Married and Safe,
sails snapped off, my canvas
rotted from stillness and sun.

Sting, world blowing past me.
I always did what I was asked.